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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 001026

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER PREL OVIP IS GOI EXTERNAL GAZA DISENGAGEMENT ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: SENATOR ALLEN'S FEBRUARY 13 MEETING WITH MFA  
OFFICIALS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) On February 13 Senator George Allen and Ambassador Kurtzer met with MFA North American Deputy Yoram Ben Ze'ev and Head of the Research Department Harry Kney'tal. They discussed developments in Europe relating to the designation of Hizbollah as a terrorist organization, and political developments in the Middle East.

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EU  
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2. (C) Ben Ze'ev opened the meeting by thanking Senator Allen for the letter he had signed with other senators that was recently sent to Brussels that supports the GOI position that Hizbollah should be designated a terrorist organization by the EU Clearinghouse. Ben Ze'ev commented, "even if there is no change, we will have at least forced them (the EU Clearinghouse) to provide an answer." The issue is pivotal for Israel because Hizbollah is not targeting Europe, but Israel.

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Iraq  
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3. (C) Commenting on his recent visit to Iraq, Senator Allen mentioned that it is a country that "can make it." Senator Allen described his meetings with Jaffari as hopeful, and an assurance that Iraq will develop into a country based on freedoms, as much as based on Islamic law. Kney'tal described his assessment that for many Muslims, it will be difficult to have one of the pillars of Sunni Islam (Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq) ruled by Sh'ia Muslims for the first time. Kney'tal hypothesized that Tehran will see Sh'ia rule of Iraq as a positive development in the short-term, but questioned how Iran will react when Iraq does not develop into a theocracy. He noted that Jordan and Saudi Arabia viewed an election victory by the Sh'ia parties with concern.

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Lebanon & Syria & Iran  
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4. (C) Kney'tal said he felt President Mahmood Abbas's recent visit to Lebanon had been successful and that Abbas's argument that he "be given a chance" had seemed to persuade some in Beirut. Nonetheless, he continued, there is the potential for Hizbollah elements operating in Southern Lebanon to carry out successful attacks in Israel that will "cause embarrassment" for Abbas. In contrast to his success in Lebanon, Abbas got no more than "a nod" from Syria. It is unlikely, he opined, that Syria will pull out of Lebanon and stop interfering in Lebanese politics prior to the upcoming elections. Kney'tal assessed that it was likely that Abbas would next take his message to Tehran.

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Disengagement & the PA  
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5. (C) Kney'tal predicted that President Abbas did not intend to "crack down" on terrorist groups operating in the West Bank or Gaza, because he cannot risk provoking a civil war, but would pursue a strategy to coopt these groups to observe the cease fire at least through the beginning of disengagement. Proud of the increase in revenue transfers from the GOI to the PA, Kney'tal mentioned the need for Arab states to make their promised contributions. Disengagement will call for bold leadership not only from Israel, but from the international community. Kney'tal also emphasized that involvement of PM Sharon, President Abbas, and President Bush made the situation on the ground, "better than it has been for the last four or five years."

6. (U) Senator Allen did not have an opportunity to clear on this cable before he departed Israel.

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KURTZER